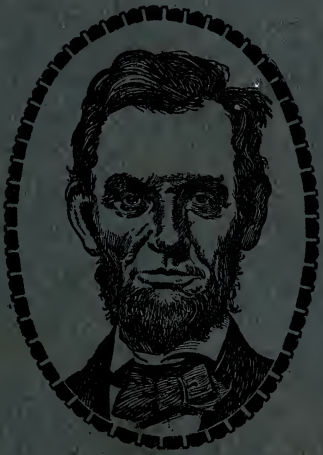
# When Lincoln kept Store



*By CLARENCE SOUSLEY*

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# When Lincoln Kept Store

*By Clarence Sousley*

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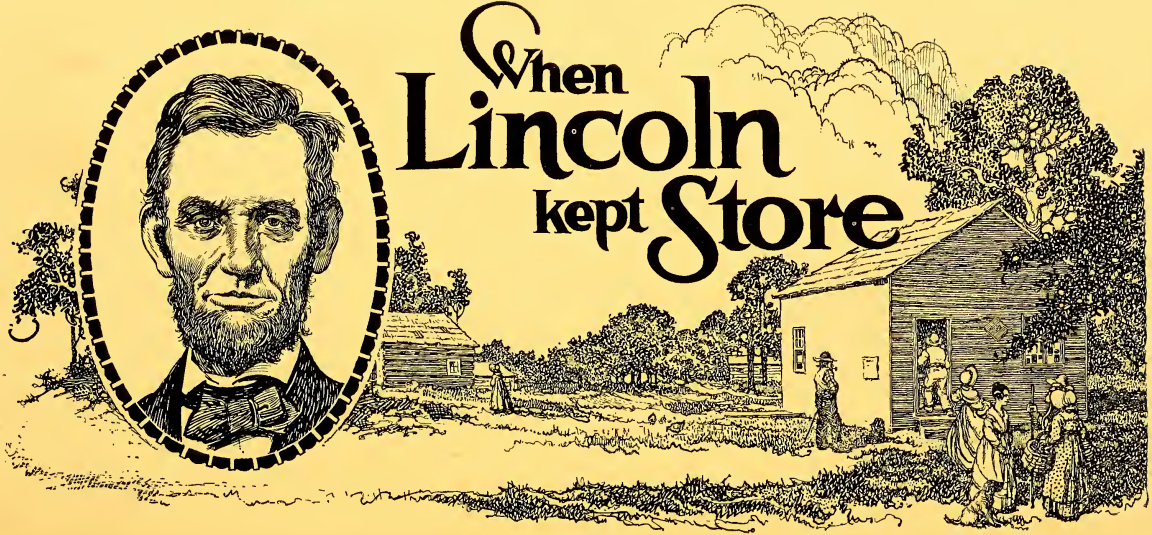
When
Lincoln
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# When Lincoln Kept Store

## An Account of a Visit to New Salem, Ill., Where Abraham Lincoln Grew from Youth to Manhood

*By Clarence Sousley*

"GLAD to see you! Glad to see you!" said Mr. Nance. "Yes, I think we can give you some help. Come around to the store in the morning and I'll take you out to the park in my car, and we'll look it over."

I had arrived in Petersburg, Ill., on the 5:17 with the purpose in view of finding some old lady or some old gentleman who had bought goods of Abraham Lincoln in the days when he clerked for Mr. Offut, or when he was in business for himself as a partner of Mr. Berry.

I am not a historian, and I have never taken any interest in dates, so just how old the customer would have to be today to have traded with Abraham Lincoln when he was a storekeeper, I did not know. I had not even considered it.

The New Salem, Ill., where Lincoln used to keep store, is now a deserted village and a public park, owned by the State of Illinois. This park contains sixty acres and was purchased by W. R. Hearst, the newspaper man, and presented to the Old Salem Lincoln League, and by it to the State of Illinois.

There is a New Salem, Ill., in Pike County with 260 inhabitants, and there is a Salem, the county seat of Marion County, with a population of 2,700, which fact tends to confuse travelers looking for Lincoln's old home.

NEW SALEM is Petersburg's park, and I should say that for the future guidance of travelers who will visit that section in ever increasing numbers, it would be a good idea for Petersburg and New Salem to be renamed together and call it all **Salem Park.**

Petersburg is a town of 2,500 inhabitants and the plat was originally surveyed by Abraham Lincoln.

The next morning at 8:30 I went with Mr. Nance, of the firm of Thompson & Nance, dry goods merchants, in his car out to the park of New Salem.

The state has recently built a new automobile road up the hill to this park, which enables autoists to easily make the grade now, which it was impossible to do on the old road.

The town of New Salem was laid out in 1829. It was situated on a hill which is in the shape of the capital letter "L", the foot of the "L" forming the bluff that runs along the Sangamon River.

We stopped our car, and Mr. Nance led me over the ground where years ago stood the completed village of New Salem.

As we walked and talked, Mr. Nance pointed out where that business building stood and whose house had been located there, and I listened and forgot myself and walked along in the past.

In my imagination I was today living in the town of New Salem, where James Rutledge kept a tavern, and his daughter, Ann, waited upon the table. Where the boys of Clary's Grove came in the evening, riding their horses at full tilt and with a revolver in each hand, shooting at the sky with an idea that they were having a good time—in that same spirit that the cowboys of the West came to town.

I was now in the village of New Salem, where Abraham Lincoln toiled as clerk in a general store, and studied Kirkham's grammar, Chitty on contracts, Blackstone, and Shakespeare between customers.

I was a child again in wonderland—on hallowed ground.

We came to the brow of the hill overlooking the Sangamon River.

"There," said Mr. Nance, pointing his finger, "you see that pile of brush down there in the river—that's where the dam was."

I looked. And then in a mist up the stream I could see coming down in a flat boat, Abe Lincoln, a boy of twenty, and Dennis Hanks, a brother of his mother, and his stepbrother, John Johnston.

They were piloting this flat boat for Denton Offut and it was on its way to the Illinois river and to the Mississippi and on to New Orleans, loaded with barrels of cured meat, flour, wheat and other products of the country.

The current of the river was swift, as it was early in the Spring, following the melting snows and spring rains.

The water rushed over the dam at a considerable depth and the flat boat came on.

I saw it coming in the mist as if it were the intention of the pilot to float right over the dam by the aid of the high water and swift current.

But lo! He had miscalculated. I saw the flat boat come up under the full speed of the current and its nose run out over the dam and up into the air.

Then it stopped, with the stern considerably sunken and taking in water.

I saw the villagers of New Salem running toward the river, anxious to lend aid. I saw them help unload the boat and carry the cargo to safety.

Then someone brought an auger and Abe Lincoln bored a

hole in the front part of the boat that was up in the air; made a plug to fit it, and the citizens of New Salem helped him tilt the boat up from the stern so the water would run out. Then they plugged the hole and the boat was pushed over the dam, to be again reloaded for its trip to New Orleans.

"Yes," said Mr. Nance, "that's how Abe Lincoln first got acquainted with the New Salem folks."

*Springtime in New Salem, 1829-35*

And then I wondered. Some people refer to things that come to us as the work of Destiny. But I would prefer to call these things accidents.

And I wondered. I wondered if that flat boat loaded with its provisions for the South, with Abraham Lincoln aboard, had negotiated that dam and passed on by the village of New Salem, located on the bluff above—if this accident had not given Abraham Lincoln the opportunity to become acquainted with these whole-souled pioneers from his native state, would he have come back from his flat boat trip to locate in this

village, or would he have gone to some other larger town and more progressive looking?

And, if he had not come back to New Salem to make it his home, what then? If he had located in some other larger, more progressive, active business town, instead of returning to New Salem, would he have become President?

I don't know. But there upon the brink of the Sangamon River, overlooking the location of the old dam, I said to Mr. Nance, "There, there, that illustrates what I believe—that what mostly happens to us is mostly an accident. If that boat had not stuck upon that dam, Abraham Lincoln would never have been President of the United States."

"Maybe not," replied Mr. Nance.

"Why," said I, "if an Abraham Lincoln came down Sangamon River today and stopped at Petersburg for a job at your store and you hired him, you would keep him so busy earning his salary that he wouldn't have time to lie down on the counter and read Kirkham's Grammar and Blackstone's works, and after supper he would feel so tired that he would go to the moving picture show instead of studying law. In a Petersburg job today he wouldn't have any show at all to educate himself to become President of the United States."

"MAYBE not," replied Mr. Nance. "He wouldn't be lying around on my counters reading a book and holding his job down for very long."

There were originally twenty-four buildings in the village of New Salem, mostly built of logs.

The Old Salem Lincoln League has taken it upon itself to in time rebuild each one of these buildings in replica, which stood there in 1832.

They have already built up the Offut store, the Tavern run by James Rutledge and his daughter, Ann, the Lincoln and Berry store, which was a frame building, and a few others.

The State of Illinois has built a concrete fire-proof building on the ground and has a keeper in charge. This building is a museum to hold souvenirs which have a connection with Lincoln's early life in the village.

On the way back to Petersburg, which is only a mile and a half, Mr. Nance's auto cracked a spring. He telephoned from the keeper's lodge for Mr. Thompson to come out in his machine for us. But Mr. Thompson's was not available, so he called up a neighbor, who cranked up his Ford Sedan and brought Mr. Thompson out to our relief. I am reciting this to show you the similarity between the whole-heartedness of the citizens of Petersburg today and the citizens of New Salem when Lincoln's flat boat struck the dam.

If I had been an Abraham Lincoln, it is possible that the

breaking of Mr. Nance's automobile spring might have been an accident that would make me President. But not probable.

However, it is probable that this accident caused me to visit Ann Rutledge's grave.

For Mr. Nance remained with his machine until the garageman came and Mr. Thompson and his neighbor took me along in the Ford Sedan, and on the way Mr. Thompson asked if I would like to ride up to the cemetery and see Ann's grave.

OF course I would. But it might have been that if Mr. Nance and I had been alone we would have been so busy talking about something else, that this would have slipped his mind. I didn't know that Ann Rutledge was buried in Petersburg.

The location of her grave is in the cemetery on the hill South of town. It is a very beautiful little cemetery.

As we three stood there, the gray mist came before me again and in it I could see a beautiful girl of past twenty—and by her side a tall awkward boy a trifle older.

And to her I heard him say: *"I love you, Ann. I have loved you for years. I would have told you long ago, but I could not make myself believe that I was good enough for you."*

Then I read the inscription upon the gravestone of this maiden:

*Out of me, unworthy and unknown,*
*The vibrations of deathless music!*
*"With malice toward none,*
*With charity for all."*
*Out of me forgiveness of millions toward millions,*
*And the beneficent face of a nation*
*Shining with justice and truth.*
*I am ANN RUTLEDGE who sleeps beneath these weeds,*
*Beloved of ABRAHAM LINCOLN,*
*Wedded to him, not through union,*
*But through separation.*
*Bloom forever, O Republic,*
*From the dust of my bosom!*
*January 7, 1813—August 25, 1835.*

It is very probable that Abraham Lincoln decided to locate at New Salem because the accident to his flat boat gave him an opportunity to learn that most of the settlers of that village were Kentuckians.

And on the site of the village of New Salem I found myself inwardly taking pride in the fact that this village had been

settled by Kentuckians and that Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis were both native born of my state.

Returning to town, Mr. Thompson took me over to meet Mrs. Shipp.

Mrs. Shipp is past ninety years of age and one of those sweet, beautiful old ladies, like we read about in such novels as "Lavender and Old Lace."

She doesn't look to be a day over sixty-five and her memory of her childhood is as clear as if the incidents happened yesterday.

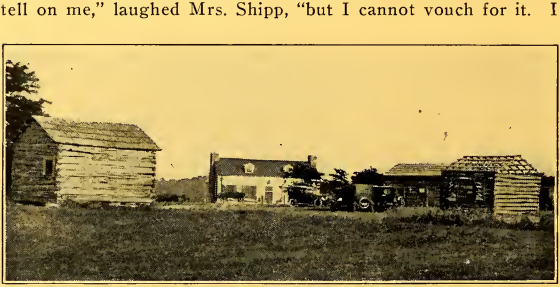
"NO," she said, "I never bought any goods of Abraham Lincoln when he was a clerk. I wasn't old enough. Abraham Lincoln gave me my name after he was a lawyer, practicing in this county."

Then I knew that my quest for someone who had bought goods of Abraham Lincoln in the early days, was over. The party I was looking for would have to be at least 110 years old. I was sure that I would be unable to find him.

So I asked Mrs. Shipp to tell me about Abraham Lincoln naming her.

"My father's name was Henry McHenry," said Mrs. Shipp, "and Abe Lincoln stopped at our house on one of his surveying trips. He liked children awfully well, and I was a girl of three years or a little over and my folks hadn't given me any name. Abe Lincoln took me on his knee and began to get acquainted with me, and asked me what my name was. When I told him I didn't have any name, he asked my mother if he could have the honor of naming me. Mother said certainly, and he said that he would name me Parthenia Jane, after Mrs. Hill, wife of the New Salem merchant, Samuel Hill.

"They tell it about me," continued Mrs. Shipp, "that after Abe named me, he asked me what I thought of my new name and that I replied, 'It's a damn pretty name.' That's what the folks tell on me," laughed Mrs. Shipp, "but I cannot vouch for it. I



*A partial view of the Village of New Salem as it is being rebuilt.*

don't know that I ever said that. I don't swear today and I cannot remember that I ever did swear."

"And then," she continued, as a smile again lit up her face, "I remember when I was a young woman and married on the farm, that Abe Lincoln and Billy Herndon and a little boy, all in a buggy, stopped at our front gate.

"I WENT out to see what they wanted, and Abe Lincoln looked at me and said, 'Don't I know you?' and I said,

*The grave of Ann Rutledge, the first sweetheart of Abraham Lincoln.*

'I guess not, I don't know you.' Then I looked at him a minute more and I knew who he was, and then I said, 'You ought to know me, you gave me my name,' and he smiled and said, 'You

are Henry McHenry's daughter. I guess I will stop and have dinner with you.'

"We had plenty to eat in those days, so I told him to alight and I would fix up the table.

"I had a big pitcher of sweet milk on the table, and Billy Herndon had been drinking too much whisky and was feverish, so he drank glass after glass of that milk. Every little bit he would address me and say, 'Mother, can't I have another glass of that milk?' and I would pour him out another glass.

"But I was only a young married woman and had no children and his calling me mother embarrassed me. Abe saw this, and he patted me on the shoulder and said, 'Parthenia, don't pay any attention to Billy today, he is not himself. He's all right."

Afterward, Mrs. Shipp kindly came out on the front porch and posed while I snapped my camera, and then she bid me goodbye and wished me luck in getting some information to make up my story.

Later, I met Captain Weaver in the Thompson & Nance store.

Captain Weaver is 85 years young and still active in the insurance business.

"No," he said, "I can't remember anything about Lincoln keeping store, but I heard him and Stephen A. Douglas in a debate once, and there is a little story about that which might help you out.

"You see, about that time, in this part of the country, prohibition was getting pretty strong. That was '53, '58, or somewhere along there, I forget the exact date. But the prohibitionists of this neighborhood were perking up their heads pretty strong and Steve Douglas thought that he might as well win out that prohibition vote as not.

"So in his debate with Lincoln he accused Lincoln of selling whiskey over the counter. That meant that Lincoln had sold it by the glass over the counter like a barkeeper.

BUT Lincoln never did any such thing. He denied it. When he was keeping store he sold whiskey by the jug or by the bottle, just like he sold vinegar or molasses. He didn't sell it by the drink at all. So he denied strongly of ever selling whiskey as a beverage. That was the term he used to indicate that he had not sold it by the drink over the counter.

"'But,' he said, 'if it is true that I sold whiskey over the counter as a beverage when I was a storekeeper—if it is true that I stood behind the counter shoving drinks toward the customers, I am sure that it would be equally true that Stephen A. Douglas was on the opposite side of the counter pulling the liquor toward him.'" Then Captain Weaver chuckled.

LINCOLN was not a good merchant. He was not even a good storekeeper.

He had no particular liking for it. His tastes and abilities did not run toward financial matters.

And even if he had been a financial genius, the chances are that going into partnership with Berry in the grocery business when he did, and where he did, and how he did, would have caused him to go broke.

Apparently he took the job as clerk in the Offut store because he recognized it as a place where he would have plenty of leisure, in which to read and study.

And when Mr. Offut engaged Willie Green as his assistant, this assured Lincoln of this leisure.

I don't know how much wages he got as head clerk in the Offut store, but it couldn't have been what we would call considerable.

His wage as flat boat pilot down the river to New Orleans was $10 a month and his keep.

I went into the replica of the old Offut store and stepped off its 14x16 feet, and made a mental calculation of the amount of merchandise it could carry of the particular kind of merchandise carried in those days, and as head clerk in this pioneer emporium, I don't believe that Lincoln could have earned more than $25.00 a month.

I doubt that as clerk, he really earned that much—although he might have received it—for I am reliably informed that: "when they entered the store Abe lay at full length on the

*The Offut General Store, where Abraham Lincoln first clerked. This store room was about* 14 x 16 *feet.*

counter, his head resting on a bolt of blue demin, as he studied the book in his hand. He wore the same shirt and worn suspenders and lengthy trousers. But his feet were covered only by his blue yarn socks."

That shows me pretty plainly that Abraham Lincoln was thinking more of his comfort and convenience and future hopes, than he was thinking about being full of pep and on the job to sell goods for Denton Offut.

Early in life he developed an ambition to become a man of distinction, and realized that to do so, he must educate himself, and that to educate himself he must have a position where there was enough leisure time between jumps to allow him to study.

Today if we had a salesman like that working for us, we might call him lazy, but I have every reason to believe that Abraham Lincoln was not lazy, for the villagers of New Salem allowed that at the time he clerked in the Offut store, he was the best man with an axe and saw in that part of the country.

Naturally the Offut store was one of general merchandise, full of various odors such as tea, coffee, whiskey, tobacco, sugar, vinegar and molasses.

Then there were bolts of cloth of various hues and various flavors, consisting of denim and gingham and calicos.

This store also carried cutlery and tableware and jewelry and fishing tackle and on the left hand side the counter held a showcase filled with thread, buttons, combs, ribbons, belt and Jews' Harps. There were tallow candles and straw hats and plug tobacco and pills and men's shirts, neckwear and underwear, some blue jeans and scythes and hose and axes, some of which were hung from the rafters, some were placed on the shelving, some on the counters and some on the floor.

ONE early description says that this store had a fireplace in the rear and a counter on each side. Looking it over from floor to rafters and from side wall to side wall, I should say that a thousand dollars worth of merchandise would have filled the room so full that Abraham Lincoln would have had to step over the merchandise in order to wait upon customers efficiently.

Record has it that he slept in the Offut store on a mattress which he piled under the counter in daytime and laid out in the center of the room at night. He probably did this to save room rent. And then his bedroom in the Offut store would have been just as comfortable as one in the Rutlege hotel where the guests had to climb a ladder into the loft and sleep on rows of mattresses filled with corn husks.

I am informed that the Offut store kept open at night and it is certain that the villagers congregated there to discuss crops, politics, dredging the Sangamon river, building railroads, etc.

The Offut Store could not have done a very great business no matter how efficient the storekeeper might have been for the community was sparsely settled and it had plenty of competition in this little town.

Besides the Offut Store, there was that of Herndon Bros., whose descendants operate a department store in Springfield today. Then the store of Hill & McNeil and that of Chrisman Bros. and Reuben Radford's place.

All of these stores carried about the same line of merchandise and you can see for yourself that in a little town of a thousand people with pioneer farmers scattered very sparsely over the landscape that this was plenty of competition.

IT is recorded that Mr. Offut had a great deal of confidence in Abraham Lincoln; thought well of him, and it is possible that if the accident of finance which made Mr. Offut a failure had by chance been on the other side of the ledger and made him a millionaire, then perhaps Abraham Lincoln would have continued as his head man and he himself would have become a millionaire and interested more and more in finances each day; and that instead of living to become a man of distinction he would have lived to become merely a man of wealth. Such is Fate or Destiny or Accident, as you will.

The Offut Store was opened for business some time in September 1831. Shortly afterward Mr. Offut leased the mill, which was located on the river bank just below the store.

This mill ground wheat, corn and sawed logs into lumber

*The Rutledge Tavern, where Ann Rutledge was hostess. There were two front rooms below, and a kitchen in the rear. The guests climbed a ladder to the loft above at retiring time, and slept on mattresses filled with corn husks.*

*"With his long arms and powerful shoulders, he lifted Armstrong bodily from the ground and slammed him flat on his back."*

and it became Lincoln's duty to look after the mill as well as to look after the store, which probably used up some of his leisure daylight hours that he had for study and caused him to sit up later by candle light with his beloved books.

Mr. Offut's admiration of his employe, Lincoln is illustrated in the following story: "As he had occasion to note Lincoln's physical power in feats of strength and manly sports, he found for him an ever increasing regard. Mr. Offut apparently was of that disposition, which to think a thing was to talk about it. This was particularly true, when he was exhilerated by the juice of the corn. So in a very short time Mr. Offut had informed William Clary, who ran a saloon about thirty steps north of the Offut Store, that Lincoln could outrun, outlift and throw down any man in the community, and waxing warm in his cups, Mr. Offut bet Clary $10 that Lincoln could outwrestle any man they might bring against him.

"JACK ARMSTRONG the champon wrestler at Clary's Grove, was selected to meet Lincoln. When told by Offut what he had done, Lincoln at first demurred, declaring he would have nothing to do with the arrangement that Offut had made without his knowledge or consent. But when confronted with the alternative of wrestling or having Mr. Offut lose his bet, and knowing the construction that would be placed by the natives upon his refusal, he consented.

"William Green, his assistant in the store, was well acquainted with Armstrong's manner of wrestling, and the tricks of which he was master, many of which he demonstrated to Lincoln and advised him to take full advantage of his long reach by holding Armstrong away from him and not allowing him to get in close where he would have the advantage because of his short and powerful physique. On the day set for the match, which took place on the small square of level ground near the Offut Store, the settlers were out in force and betting ran high.

"Lincoln profiting by the warning given him by Willie Green, kept Armstrong at arm's length and just as strenuously did Armstrong attempt to close in. Finding himself unable to use any of his favorite tricks permissible in the code of the game, Armstrong resorted to a foul. Just what this was is more or less in dispute but the best tradition has it that he stamped or attempted to stamp Lincoln's instep with his boot heel and at the same time throwing the weight of his body forward.

"This act so enraged Lincoln that with his long arms and powerful shoulders, he lifted Armstrong bodily from the ground and slammed him with great force flat upon his back. Armstrong's friends assumed threatening poses and were about to attack Lincoln in force. Lincoln stepped back close to the building and braced himself for the attack.

"BY this time, Armstrong had recovered sufficiently to get his feet and stepping forward, he extended his hand to Lincoln and apologized for his unsportsmanlike act, and in the presence of all those assembled acknowledged that Lincoln was the better man."

Some writers have taken pleasure in attempting to blacken the character of the "Clary Grove boys" as they were known in those days, but while they were hard drinkers and dare-devil sports, I have the word of the old settlers around Petersburg and New Salem that they were regular sports and friends of Lincoln's and that they always helped carry the election in that township for him.

It seems that their friendship for Lincoln dated from the wrestling match with Jack Armstrong.

Shortly after this wrestling match, Willie Green complained to Lincoln that he had lost a number of small bets with a man by the name of Estep who worked a little game by twisting the fingers of his hand together in a confusing way and then challenging the onlooker to pick out his little finger.

In retaliation, Lincoln advised Willie Green to bet Estep that he, Lincoln, could lift a barrel of whiskey from the floor and hold it while he took a drink out of the bung hole.

ACCORDINGLY, Willie Green set out in search of Estep bent upon winning back his losings and soon succeeded in making a bet, the stake being a fur hat. Lincoln won it for him, by sitting in a squatting position and rolling the barrel upon his knees until the bung hole was opposite his face when he reached over and gradually tilting the barrel took his drink—"which he immediately spit out"—so the old settlers say. Maybe he did. If he had intended to spit it out he could have used the vinegar barrel just as well and left no doubt in the minds of future generations about it. Yes?

I am sure that I have nothing against him if he swallowed it.

From that date Lincoln gradually became the supreme judge in horse races, physical contests and the umpire of settlements of disputes in the community and if anyone was disposed to question his decision, the first mutter of criticism brought down upon his head fierce condemnation from his fellows and especially from the Clary Grove boys.

These recitations by the old timers show very plainly that he was not over-burdened with work in his duties of attending to the Offut Store and looking after the mill.

It is recorded that as soon as Lincoln got settled in his job of clerking for Mr. Offut, he decided to look about for some books to improve his education. More than any other thing at this time, he desired to improve himself in the use of English. Meeting the local schoolmaster, Mentor Graham, he inquired of

him for an English grammar and was advised that there was one in the possession of a man by the name of John Vance, who lived six miles in the country.

That night after closing the store, Lincoln walked the six miles to Vance's house to secure the grammar.

THIS shows he was not a lazy man, even if he did lie at full length on the counter, studying grammar and reading Blackstone and Shakespeare. One day Mr. Offut left and never returned. In the language of Abraham Lincoln, the store petered out; and he was out of a job.

Just at that time there was some danger from the uprising of the Indians under Chief Blackhawk and Lincoln volunteered his services and after he came back from the army to New Salem in about June 1832, he entered into his campaign for the legislature and was defeated by Peter Cartwright, who in turn was defeated for Congress by Lincoln in 1846.

In the meantime, it was necessary that he should have some employment as a means of livelihood, preferably at a place and under conditions where he could meet and mingle with the people. He sought employment as a clerk in a New Salem store. Nothing of this kind offered. One of the Herndon Bros. had sold his half interest in the store owned by them at New Salem to Wm. F. Berry. The other partner became dissatisfied with Berry and sold his interest in the store to Lincoln, taking promissory notes in payment of the purchase price. Thus Lincoln became a merchant in his own right and one of the Business Fraternity of the village.

A short time before this the Chrisman Bros. had failed and a portion of their stock of groceries had been taken over by James Rutledge upon a debt—James Rutledge the tavern keeper. This stock was purchased from Rutledge by Berry & Lincoln, they giving their note in payment.

A FEW months later, Reuben Radford incurred the enmity of the Clary Grove boys, which resulted in Berry & Lincoln securing his stock of goods and moving into that store.

Radford was a large man of great physical strength and announced his ability to look after his own rights and to protect them. He was told that such an attitude would cause the Clary boys to try him out, and that they would surely lick him. That if one of them couldn't do this, two or three of them together could and would. Radford had left his younger brother in charge of the store, telling him to be careful and directing him to sell the Clary Grove boys in case they came in, but two drinks of liquor each.

The Clary boys came and indeed got their two drinks of liquor. Being denied more, they shoved the protesting youth out of the way, stepped behind the counter and proceeded to help themselves. They all got rip-roaring drunk and turned

things in the store topsy-turvy. They broke the crockery and knocked out the windows, leaving chaos and ruin in their wake.

Then they leaped on their horses, yelling like wild Indians and left the town for their homes.

The bunch of them passed a short distance from where Radford was stopping in the country and hearing the yells, he immediately feared the worst, and leaping on his horse ran him all the way to New Salem.

Here he dismounted from his panting steed and rushed into the store.

Broken glass and crockery ware covered the floor and the contents seemed to be a total wreck.

Stepping outside Radford declared that he would sell out to the first man who made him an offer.

WILLIAM GREEN, the former assistant of Lincoln in the Offut Store, was coming along on horseback with some grist for the mill.

Hearing Radford's words he said: "Sell out to me Mr. Radford." Radford replied, "I will; how much will you give?"

Green rode up to the side of the store and sticking his head through a broken window, looked over the contents and offered Radford $400.00 for the building, ground and stock. Radford accepted the offer.

The news of this purchase traveled fast through New Salem and soon Lincoln came over to see his old friend and competitor.

Looking over the contents, he told Willie that they must take an inventory of the stock.

Willie did not understand just what an "inventory" meant. He thought it meant some sort of a jamboree or celebration along the lines followed by the Clary Grove boys.

"Abe, he said, "I don't believe this store will stand another one, just at this time."

Lincoln explained that by inventory he meant the listing of the goods and the setting opposite each item the value thereof.

So they at once proceeded to make the inventory.

Green paid $23.00 cash and for the balance gave two notes, which were secured by a mortgage drawn and witnessed by Lincoln.

Before the inventory was completed, it was evident that the store would amount to nearly $1,200.00.

Berry & Lincoln bought it from Green for $750.00, paying him $250.00 in silver dollars and assuming the payment of his notes for the balance to Radford, and by turning over a horse, saddle and bridle owned by Berry.

Berry & Lincoln then moved their stock into the new store building and prepared to make considerable money, so the

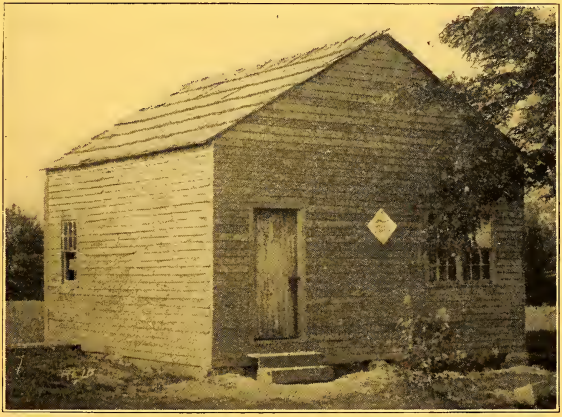
records of the old settlers go, as competition had now been reduced to but one other store, the Hill & McNeil store, now owned solely by Mr. Hill. But Lincoln & Berry's venture in the mercantile business did not bring in the returns anticipated. A considerable part of the stock purchased by them from their predecessors consisted of liquors and because of Lincoln's prejudice against its sale and use, hindered the disposal of it to any appreciable extent. This state of circumstances gave Berry the opportunity he craved and being the senior partner, he applied for and secured in the name of Berry & Lincoln a license for a Tavern which meant solely in this case the right to sell liquor by the drink.

This permit was granted on the sixth day of March, 1833.

Shortly afterward Lincoln sold his interest in the store to Berry, taking Berry's notes, one of which he turned over to James Rutledge in payment of his part of the indebtedness of the firm to Rutledge.

Afterward when Berry sold out to the Trent Bros. and they left between two suns, leaving their notes unpaid and Berry had died insolvent, Lincoln offered his note to Rutledge for the amount due. This Rutledge refused, stating that he had agreed to take Berry's notes for the debt of Lincoln and proposed to keep his agreement, and if he failed to get his money from Berry's estate, he would lose it.

THE Berry & Lincoln store was a frame building, weather-boarded, and was about twenty-five feet square, and at that time was the leading retail business building of the village in size and pretention.



*The store building in which Berry & Lincoln ran a grocery.*

"But," as one of the old timers said to me, "starting a store by paying for it with promissory notes, and then with Lincoln lying on the counter reading law and Berry sitting in the back room by the whiskey barrel, no business could be a success.

However, under a different management and plan, I don't know but that Abraham Lincoln would have been a good merchant, for he had the advertising bee in his bonnet. He knew how to make customers, although he never used this ability to any great extend in merchandising.

But he showed this ability very strongly when he ran for the legislature.

"In this campaign Lincoln rode about the country meeting the people and soliciting their support. When stopping at any place he immediately made friends with the children and gathering the smaller ones upon his knees and the others about him, he would entertain them while the busy mother prepared the meal. He would carry in water and if need be, split wood with which to cook the meal. If the men folks were engaged in mowing grain, splitting rails or putting up hay, he would rest them by taking the scythe and mowing the swath, by splitting a few rails or pitching hay.

"Whatever they were engaged in doing he could do, and did it as well or better than they. In this manner he made friends wherever he went and by his good humor, jokes and stories, interested and entertained them and upon all live questions of the day and particularly upon those matters of special interest to his electorate he talked with convincing eloquence and logic."

I DARESAY that if a Berry & Lincoln store were started today under our present prohibition arrangements and with sufficient capital to stock it with the necessary merchandise to meet the wants of the community and that if Mr. Berry would attend to the buying and managing the sales people in the store and Lincoln would visit with the customers, as he did in the days of his campaign, possibly driving a Huckster wagon to help pay expenses, Mr. Store would be a happy success.

There are many little stories told about Lincoln in the days of his storekeeping life that are too numerous for this article, but one of them especially interested me. It was where he accidentally overcharged a customer four cents on a bill of goods and that evening after the store closed, walked three miles to return the four cents. This story was recited to me as one highly commendable of his honesty, but I accepted it as a story of bad judgment. He could have just as well made out a credit slip for that four cents and given it to the customer the next time she visited the store.

After Lincoln was out of the storekeeping business entirely, he was appointed Postmaster of New Salem and held this posi-

tion until the post office went out of existence, or was transferred to Petersburg. Later he studied surveying and got a job at $3.00 per day, which was quite an advancement over the salary he had received as a clerk in the Offut Store.

The indebtedness of the Berry & Lincoln firm, after it failed, amounted to $1,100.00 and I am told that Lincoln paid off this amount in later years.

ONE of the accidents which occurred to him and had a material influence on Lincoln's after life was when a mover passing through New Salem stopped in front of the Berry & Lincoln store. In his wagon there was a barrel which took up considerable room and which he asked Lincoln to buy. Lincoln had no use for the barrel, but following the kindly impulse of his nature, he purchased it for fifty cents and set it in a corner of the store. Some days later, noticing the barrel, he emptied the contents on the floor. Among these he found a complete copy of Blackstone's Commentaries and at once became absorbed in their study. In his own words: "I began to read those famous works and I had plenty of time; for during the long summer days when the farmers were busy with their crops, my customers were few and far between. The more I read the more intensely interested I became. Never in my whole life was my mind so thoroughly absorbed. I read until I devoured them."

*"'Look at me,' said Eli; 'don't you hear my clothes say something?'*

*"'They are very eloquent,' said Lincoln. 'Eli, you may sell me a suit.'"*

Once when Lincoln was waiting on some lady customers a young man came into the store, sat down on a box and began talking to some friends, emphasizing his remarks with oaths. Lincoln took him outside the store and rubbed his mouth with smartweed until he promised to quit swearing altogether. It is recorded that this young man afterwards became a Methodist church member and a good moral citizen.

The job of postmaster alone was not sufficient to make Lincoln a living, so he looked out for extra jobs; made rails, looked after the mill, attended to the saw mill and harvested hay and grain, and on occasions helped out in other stores, particularly that of Samuel Hill. He earned barely enough for subsistence.

IT was just about this time that he secured the position of assistant surveyor to Mr. Calhoun at $3.00 per day.

He made the original survey of the town of Petersburg in 1836. In doing this work he found that Jemima Elmore, the widow of an old friend, who had been a member of his Company in the Blackhawk war, had bought a little tract of land and built a home where she lived with her children within the ground to be surveyed, and that if the street ran straight north and south a part of her house would be in the street. To save the house, he set his compass to run south one degree east, and ran the cross streets at right angles to the north and south street, thus the result of this skewing of the line shows in the plat of Petersburg today.

It is related that in the early days of New Salem the community was visited at regular intervals by a peddler by the name of Eli Freudenberg. He was always welcomed by the customers and merchants alike on account of the news he carried with him from place to place.

Later in life when Lincoln began to feel the signs of prosperity he went to Springfield to buy his first tailor-made suit of clothes of blue jeans. In looking over the town of Springfield, he came to a store with a gold sign over the front reading FREUDENBERG'S EMPORIUM, and on either end of this sign in smaller letters was "cloth, cassinets, cassimeres, velvet, silks, satins, marseilles, waistcoatings, morocco pumps, crepe lisse, lace veils, Thibet shawls, Prunella shoes, hair nets."

"THAT reads like a strange language to me," said Abraham Lincoln. "I'd like to see what Morocco pumps are." So he went inside, and much to his surprise found that the proprietor was his old friend, the peddler, Eli.

"This is my store," said Eli.

"Your store!" exclaimed Abe.

"Yaw, look at de sign."

"My conscience," Lincoln said, "Eli, you look as if you had been fixed up to be sold to the highest bidder!"

The hairy, dusty, bowlegged, threadbare peddler of long ago apparently had been touched by some fairy's wand. The lavish hand of the West had showered her favors upon him. He was dressed in a way that displayed his prosperity. He replied: "Abe, you are getting to be like me. You are getting the pack off your back, too. Look at me. Don't you hear my clothes say something?"

"They are very eloquent," replied Lincoln. "Eli you may sell me a suit."

* * *

At 3:15 P. M., the busman of Petersburg called at the hotel for all those going North. I climbed into his Ford with two other travelers and as we left the town, ringing in my ears was the admonition of Mr. Nance, which expresses the sentiment and the pride of the community of Petersburg in its connection with the life of Abraham Lincoln! **"Springfield can make much of Abraham Lincoln if she wishes. It is right that she should. But Springfield must remember that Petersburg took Abraham Lincoln, a green uneducated country boy, and gave him to Springfield a finished man."**

The Ford car gave two coughs and stopped at the Alton Depot. Thus ended my journey to the storekeeping home of the GREAT EMANCIPATOR.

*The concrete fireproof building erected by the State of Illinois, for the preservation of Lincoln souvenirs. It contains many early photographs of young Abe Lincoln, a riding saddle owned by Ann Rutledge, a Bible and a day-book kept in the store by Lincoln. In the day-book were charged many items of merchandise, among them the following, of amusing interest today: "1 Galon of Liquor. 40c." This item is shown quite frequently throughout the book.*

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